

WHERE IS "THE"? SOME CONTRASTIVE PATTERN PRACTICES

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The student pushed through the following patterns should get the idea that "the" is not a simple, definite alternative for a simple, indefinite "a." "The" occupies a syntactic slot which overlaps the "a" slot in just one place—before singular count nouns.

There is nothing in other languages quite like the distribution of "the" in English. Take the utterance, "I like coffee but I don't like the coffee in South Quad." Persians insist they particularize "the coffee in South Quad" in: *mæn qæhve dust dæraem æmma næ qæhveye South Quadre*. Italians say they particularize "the coffee in South Quad" in "mi piace il caffè ma non il caffè di South Quad."

That being the case, we might expect both Persians and Italians to learn some quick translation correspondences and produce English "the," or leave it out, without error. Unfortunately, Persians tend to omit "the" although they do use it unexpectedly: "... but not coffee in *the* South Quad." Italians, on the other hand, use "the" everywhere: "I like *the* coffee but not *the* coffee in *the* South Quad."

The following exercises were first developed for Italian students, later expanded for Persian students, and are now being used with mixed groups. I have found them a helpful supplement to materials contained in our texts.

The method of presenting these contrastive pattern practices will be described below. The practices themselves should make the contrasts fairly obvious even to lowest level students, as well as to teachers unfamiliar with this technique.

There are two kinds of "the" in these exercises, restrictive "the" and lexical "the." Each of these has a corresponding "no-the."

The first "the" may be thought of as marking the beginning of a restrictive frame which identifies or particularizes the enclosed nominal, as in the utterance:

I don't like the coffee in South Quad.

The second "the," which I call lexical "the," is the one for which learners must keep their ears in tune in order to catch its unexplainable use, as in:

I want to see the Mississippi [a river].

Equally important, in addition, is the absence of "the" which, because of classroom usage, I call "no-the." "No-the" marks the beginning of a frame used around nominals when speaking in generalities, as in:

I like coffee.

There is also a lexical "no-the" which will always occur in utterances like:

I want to see Mississippi [a state].

Because lexical "the" and "no-the" are more or less vocabulary items:

1. lexical "the"

the Alps

the Mississippi

the United Kingdom

2. lexical "no-the"

London

Mississippi

England

contrastive pattern practices for them are included here only after students have been given-contrastive drill in frames marked by the presence or absence of restrictive "the," as in the utterance:

I like | coffee | but I don't
like the coffee in South Quad.

Although students are pushed through these pattern practices with no explanations of a traditional nature beforehand, they are given an opportunity to make an inductive guess at the occurrence of "the" or "no-the."

I have used the following order of presentation:

1. Attention pointer (written on the blackboard and repeated orally with the class in chorus).

I like coffee but I don't

like the | coffee | in South Quad.

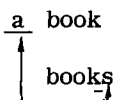
2. Grammar induction. The students should notice "no-the"

for the first "coffee" and "the . . . in South Quad" restricting the second "coffee" in the utterance. I have found it helpful here to be sure the students induce the terminology "in general" for the first "coffee" and "in particular" for the second "coffee." Broadly stated, they should see that "no-the" means the nominal in general, while "the" means the nominal in a restricted particularity.

3. Pattern practice. The student should be introduced to the pattern with his attention focused on the problem at hand. Then, by substituting other items, the focus of his attention is drawn away from the structure being repeated. This forces the structure into his subconscious. The practice should first drill one pattern, then a contrasting one, and then test the two patterns by putting them together and forcing a choice.

In terms of class time, the presentation of the attention pointer on the blackboard, and its choral drill, should not last longer than a minute. Grammar induction should not take more than a minute. Longer presentations waste time.

These exercises have been shortened for publication here. Teachers should not tackle these patterns until students have had a suitable introduction to the "a" slot with its alternate plural marker for count nouns, and to the "no-a" for mass nouns.



A simple test exercise for "a" follows.

- A. DIRECTIONS: In the test utterance, "I see a house," replace "a house" with words from the list below. The student should say "possible" or "impossible." If impossible, he should give the correct form or forms. (On the blackboard, write: "I see _____")
 1. a house
possible
 2. book
impossible. a book . . . books
 3. car
impossible. a car . . . cars
 4. coffee
possible
 5. a bread
impossible. bread

6. child
impossible. a child . . . children
7. coat
impossible. a coat . . . coats
8. teacher
impossible. a teacher . . . teachers

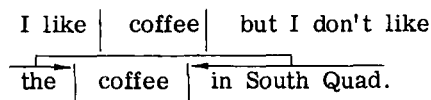
A second simple exercise for testing "a" overlapping the "no-the" slot before singular count nouns follows.

B. DIRECTIONS: if the following items are plural, make them singular.

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. boys
a boy | 5. the coffee
the coffee |
| 2. coffee
coffee | 6. places
a place |
| 3. the boys
the boy | 7. the books
the book |
| 4. books
a book | 8. children
a child |

Pattern Practices

DIRECTIONS: For most of these exercises, the students should repeat the pattern sentence several times until it is over-learned. Then they should make substitutions cued by the teacher from the list under each exercise. The pattern sentence is the first item in each exercise. The correct student response to the second cue is included as an aid to teachers unfamiliar with this technique. The following diagram should be on the blackboard:



I. Introducing mass nouns not marked by "the."

1. coffee
I like coffee
2. rice
I like rice
3. milk
4. fruit
5. meat
6. tea

II. Introducing mass nouns marked by "the."

1. coffee

- I don't like the coffee in South Quad.
2. rice

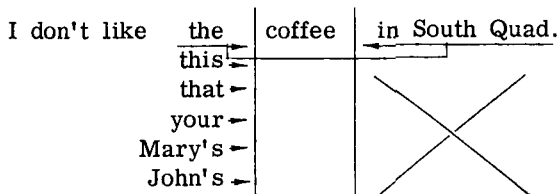
- I don't like the rice in South Quad.
3. milk
 4. fruit
 5. meat
 6. tea

III. Contrasting "no-the" with a restrictive frame marked by "the," using mass nouns.

1. coffee
I like coffee, but I don't like the coffee in South Quad.

2. rice
I like rice, but I don't like the rice in South Quad.
3. milk
4. fruit
5. meat
6. tea

IV. Introducing a restrictive frame marked by "this," or "your," or "Mary's." The following diagram should be added to the blackboard:



1. this
I don't like this coffee.
2. your
I don't like your coffee.
3. Mary's
4. that
5. John's
6. his

V. Contrasting a restrictive frame marked by "the" with one using "this," or "your," or "Mary's."

1. in South Quad.
I don't like the coffee in South Quad.
2. this
I don't like this coffee.

3. in this restaurant
4. that
5. Mary's
6. at John's house

VI. Introducing plural count nouns.

1. potatoes
I like potatoes, but I don't like the potatoes in South Quad.
2. eggs
3. apples
4. oranges
5. beans
6. bananas

VII. Contrasting "this" for mass nouns and "these" for plurals.

1. potatoes
I like potatoes, but I don't like these potatoes.
2. coffee
I like coffee, but I don't like this coffee.
3. apples
4. bread
5. oranges
6. eggs

VIII. Contrasting restrictive frames containing "this" and "these" with frames marked by "the."

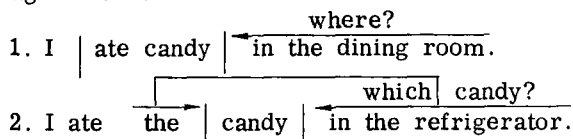
1. potatoes in this store
I don't like the potatoes in this store.
2. coffee in this store
I don't like the coffee in this store.
3. this
I don't like this coffee.
4. in this store
5. potatoes
6. Mary's
7. these
8. coffee
9. apples
10. in this store

IX. Introducing four general types of restrictive frames marked by "the."

1. in this store
I don't like the books in this store.
2. in that library

3. on your table
4. that Mary gave me
5. that we use in class
6. written by Hemingway
7. sold in this store
8. lying on the table
9. being read in our class

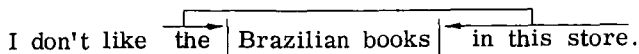
- X. Contrasting restrictive frames for the verb and for the object. Use pattern 1 whenever possible. Use pattern 2 only when the speaker can not seriously have eaten candy in the specified location (e.g., pattern 1 can not be used with "in the refrigerator.") Put the following diagram on the blackboard:



1. in the dining room [1]
I ate candy in the dining room.
2. in the refrigerator [2]
I ate the candy in the refrigerator.
3. in the restaurant [1]
4. in the plastic bag [2]
5. in the bus [1]
6. on the table [2]
7. in my pocket [2]
8. in my lunchbox [2]

- XI. Introducing plural count nouns in "no-the" slots with specifying attributives present. Put the following diagram on the blackboard:

I like to read Brazilian books.



1. Brazilian books
I like to read Brazilian books.
2. geography books
I like to read geography books.
3. books about photography
4. history books
5. books written by Hemingway
6. books about cars

7. home decoration books
8. books about art
9. cook books

XII. Introducing plural count nouns in restrictive frames marked by "the" and containing specifying attributives.

1. Brazilian books

I don't like the Brazilian books in this store.

2. books about cars

I don't like the books about cars in this store.

3. poetry books

4. geography books

5. paper-back books

6. English books

7. books about photography

8. art books

XIII. Contrasting "no-the" with "the" before a frame containing plural count nouns with specifying attributives present.

1. Brazilian books

I like to read Brazilian books but I don't like the Brazilian books in this store.

2. geography books

I like to read geography books but I don't like the geography books in this store.

3. books about cars

4. poetry books

5. paper-back books

6. English books

7. books about photography

8. art books

XIV. Introducing lexical "the."

1. the City of Rome

I want to see the
City of Rome.

2. the United States

3. the Soviet Union

4. the United Kingdom

5. the Republic of the
Philippines

6. the Empire of Iran

7. the Far West

8. the East

9. the White House

10. the Empire State Building

11. the Pantheon

12. the George Washington
Bridge

13. the University of Hawaii

14. the Mississippi

15. the Amazon

16. the Hudson

17. the Thames

18. the Rocky Mountains

19. the Alps

20. the Pyrenees

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 21. the White Mountains | 26. the newest buildings |
| 22. the President | 27. the last bus stop |
| 23. the Kennedys | 28. the best student |
| 24. the Windsors | 29. the most important cities in America |
| 25. the first automobile | 30. the movies |

XV. Introducing lexical "no-the."

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. America | 15. Russia |
| I want to visit | 16. Iran |
| America. | 17. Colombia |
| 2. Italy | 18. Turkey |
| 3. John Kennedy | 19. Mexico |
| 4. Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy | 20. Taiwan |
| 5. President and Mrs. Kennedy | 21. New York City |
| 6. Ambassador Bridge | 22. Tehran |
| 7. Pike's Peak | 23. London |
| 8. Bear Mountain | 24. Rome |
| 9. Niagara Falls | 25. Tokyo |
| 10. Lake Ontario | 26. Ohio State University |
| 11. California | 27. Harvard University |
| 12. Texas | 28. Westminster Abbey |
| 13. Japan | |
| 14. England | |

XVI. Contrasting lexical "the" with lexical "no-the."

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Michigan | 13. President |
| I'm going to Michigan. | 14. President Kennedy |
| 2. United States | 15. Hudson River |
| 3. America | 16. White House |
| 4. Republic of Honduras | 17. newest buildings |
| 5. England | 18. Library of Congress |
| 6. Tehran | 19. movies |
| 7. City of Rome | 20. Oradell, New Jersey |
| 8. Amazon | 21. Bear Mountain |
| 9. Mississippi River | 22. Alps |
| 10. Mary | 23. Far West |
| 11. Kennedys' | 24. Alaska |
| 12. University of Wisconsin | 25. Rocky Mountains |

XVII. Introducing some items marked by "the" without further restriction. Put the following information on the black-board:

In the Brown's house

Downstairs

a kitchen
a living room
a dining room

Upstairs

a bathroom
a bedroom
a closet

Repeat with the class in chorus: "In the Brown's house, there are six rooms. Downstairs, there's a kitchen, a dining room, and a living room. Upstairs, there's a bedroom, a bathroom, and a closet."

1. puts clothes

Mrs. Brown puts clothes in the closet.

2. cooks

Mrs. Brown cooks in the kitchen.

3. sleeps

4. eats

5. brushes her teeth

6. watches television

XVIII. Introducing more items marked by "the" without further restriction. Write the following list on the blackboard: a bank, a movie theater, a post office, a grocery store, a drug store, a hospital, a laundry.

1. spent Saturday night

Mr. Brown spent Saturday night at the movie theater.

2. cashed his check

Mr. Brown cashed his check at the bank.

3. saw his doctor

4. asked the price of potatoes

5. bought airmail stamps

6. got some aspirin

7. left his shirts

XIX. Introducing a frame with zero instead of "the" or "no-the." Put the following diagram on the blackboard:

I like this		type		of book.
		kind		
		sort		
		brand		

1. type

I like this type of book.

2. kind

I like this kind of book.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 3. coffee | 7. kind |
| I like this kind of coffee. | 8. tobacco |
| 4. sort | 9. brand |
| I like this sort of coffee. | 10. sort |
| 5. type | 11. person |
| 6. car | 12. weather |

XX. Contrasting lexical "no-the" with "the" marking a restrictive frame. (This exercise might be postponed to a relatively advanced stage.)

1. Mary that John married
 I know Mary, but she's not the Mary that John married.
2. George that sells cars
 I know George, but he's not the George that sells cars.
3. America that Carl Sandburg loves
 I know America, but it's not the America that Carl Sandburg loves.
4. Jim Roberts that went to school with you
5. New York City in Gershwin's music
6. Rome of ancient history
7. Helen Gregory who works at the radio station